



STATEMENT BY THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF  
THE 9<sup>TH</sup> REVIEW CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS  
CONVENTION (BWC)

29 NOVEMBER 2022

Mr President,

On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to extend our congratulations on your election as President of the 9<sup>th</sup> Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). I assure you of my delegation's full co-operation and support in ensuring a successful conclusion to our deliberations.

South Africa associates itself with the statement delivered by Azerbaijan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States Parties to the BWC and the view, shared by NAM Heads of State and Government in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2019, that the possibility of any use of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins as weapons should be completely excluded, and reiterates the conviction that such use would be repugnant to the conscience of humankind.

Mr President, South Africa would like to restate its commitment to the full, effective and balanced implementation of the BWC and to multilateral-based processes and negotiations.

The BWC and its Review Conference makes an important contribution every five years to the family of disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, and to the maintenance of international peace and security, by preventing the threat posed by biological weapons.

Mr President, South Africa would like to thank you for the fruitful and inclusive regional consultations held earlier this year, in particular, the discussions conducted with African Member States during the Regional Preparatory meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

South Africa also welcomes the efforts by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), since the last Review Conference in 2016, to promote the universalization of the BWC. In this regard we welcome our sisterly neighbour, Namibia as the 184<sup>th</sup> Member of the Convention. South Africa would like to encourage States which have not yet joined the BWC to accede to the convention without delay.

Mr President, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how vulnerable the world is to fast-spreading diseases that can disrupt human, animal and plant life across regions and continents with devastating consequences. The review of the BWC Convention could not have come at a more relevant and appropriate time. The strengthening of its provisions and its implementation have never been more urgent.

In this regard, the priorities for my delegation include: to continue to support the provisions in Article I and the firm determination of State Parties to condemn any use of biological agents or toxins, equipment or means of delivery for other than "peaceful purposes", by anyone, at any time, and under any circumstances.

South Africa will continue to underpin the responsible production, possession and trade of products and advanced technologies in the biological field. South Africa, in so doing, is committed to promoting the benefits which disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control hold for international peace and security, particularly to countries in Africa and the Non-Aligned Movement.

In terms of Article II, South Africa will continue to encourage voluntary exchange of information in the form of Confidence Building Measures (CBM), voluntary declarations, statements, and the submission of information to UNODA by Member States on the possession or destruction of agents, toxins, equipment or means of delivery as it increases transparency and confidence in the Convention in the absence of a verification mechanism. South Africa commends the ISU's efforts since the last review Conference to increase the numbers of States that have submitted CBM reports.

Having said this, South Africa recognizes the importance of strengthening the Convention through a legally binding verification mechanism. South Africa calls for the resumption of the multilateral negotiations for a legally binding Protocol dealing with all Articles of the Convention including a verification mechanism. There is no doubt that the 9<sup>th</sup> Review Conference offers a unique and appropriate opportunity to consider proposals and processes that are able to take us closer to achieving this goal.

Mr President, as we advance the interest of the Convention, South Africa will continue to support under Article III that State Parties should take appropriate measures at national level for the effective implementation of export controls without limiting the transfer of scientific knowledge, technology, equipment and materials for peaceful purposes as also specified under Article X. Any export control measures under the Convention should be addressed through multilateral negotiations to preserve the integrity and the delicate balance that exists in the Convention.

Mr President, the strengthening of national focal points for the coordination of the national implementation of the Convention remains a priority for South Africa. South Africa welcomes initiatives that aim to provide assistance to developing countries, in particular African Member States, that still need to develop and adopt legislative, administrative and other measures designed to enhance domestic compliance with the Convention. South Africa also supports the promotion and development of training programmes for awareness raising and believes that the promotion of a culture of responsibility amongst relevant national professionals and the establishment of voluntary codes of conduct for scientists for biosafety and biosecurity may assist in this regard. South Africa encourages States Parties that are able to provide legal or training assistance to do so upon request.

In terms of Article V, South Africa considers that it should continue to act as a key mechanism under the Convention for bilateral and multilateral dialogue and cooperation among Member States. It is an important tool that can improve the universal implementation of the Convention in accordance with the UN Charter. South Africa continues to also support the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism (UNSGM) as an independent investigative mechanism and an option to Member States for the investigation of alleged use of biological weapons. It is for this reason that South Africa, in cooperation with UNODA, hosted a basic training course for qualified experts nominated to the UNSGM roster. The training course was held from 20 June to 01 July 2022 in Johannesburg, and it was the first UNSGM training course to be held in Africa as well as outside the Western European and Others Group of countries.

Mr President, South Africa strongly believes in the need to strengthen the implementation of article VII. South Africa considers that State Parties can provide humanitarian assistance or support such assistance to any State Party that so requests it, in the event of a violation of the Convention. For this, South Africa has proposed for adoption during the 9<sup>th</sup> Review Conference voluntary guidelines under the Convention that can help Member States to provide assistance

to any State Party that so requests it, in the event of a violation of the Convention. South Africa is also of the opinion that proposals for a database and an umbrella mechanism under Article VII could complement the guidelines paper and better strengthen and operationalise Article VII.

On the issue of Article X of the Convention, South Africa believes that as we continue our endeavours to strengthen the BWC regime, it is vital that we should also focus on the developmental and co-operation features of the Convention. South Africa, as an African country and member of the Non-Aligned Movement, shares the view that Article X should promote the right of States Parties to participate in the exchange of technology, equipment, materials and scientific information for peaceful purposes, and that States Parties in a position to do so, should contribute to the further development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in this field. South Africa also strongly believes, in line with Article X of the Convention, that its implementation should not hamper economic and technological development of the peaceful uses of biological agents but allow the beneficial elements of these agents to be developed to aid humanity.

Mr President, South Africa is ready to support the institutional strengthening of the Convention, in particular any efforts aimed at streamlining the intersessional period through processes that are able to address existing gaps in the Convention such as discussions on a verification mechanism, a science and technology process, and ways to enhance cooperation and assistance under the Convention. South Africa is particularly supportive of ideas and proposals that can move the intersessional period and the MSP back to producing consensus-based outcome documents and having an MSP that is able to take decisions on areas where there is consensus. At the same time, South Africa looks forward to a more gender sensitive BWC and a better staffed ISU. The adoption of new proposals should take into consideration the staffing of the ISU, which should be financed through annual assessed contributions by Member States as this would ensure that new proposals are fully implementable for an effective and efficient BWC.

In conclusion, Mr President, South Africa would like to encourage all States Parties to the Convention to work together in achieving the goals of the Convention. South Africa stands ready to cooperate and is willing to do what is required to promote the Convention's objectives to eradicate the threat of biological weapons and diseases around the world.

I thank you.

